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FRANKLIN'S KEY

A Brief Biography

of the

GREATEST AMERICAN

BY

WAYNE WHIPPLE



FRANKLIN PRINTING Co.

PUBLISHERS

PHILADELPHIA

FRANKLIN'S KEY IS YOURS

BY means of a key Benjamin Franklin performed his best-known experiment, that of attracting the lightning from the clouds and proving that lightning is identical with electricity. But the iron key on the kite-string was not the real key to Franklin's success in life. Franklin's true key was a common-sense view of practical, every-day life. It is a kind of pass-key which will unlock the door of opportunity for you.

Industry is a great and valuable thing so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. Many make money, but they seem unable to keep it. "To *have* and to *hold*" is the sum and substance of success and happiness in life. Of all "Poor Richard's" wise maxims none contains the seed of a more flourishing and wide-spreading tree of truth than that homely little phrase:

"A Penny saved is a Penny earned."

Franklin's life-story is here presented as a practical illustration of the success which is possible to every one who really wishes for it. Franklin accomplished great things by taking care of the little things of life as they came along. **Franklin's Key** is here offered you with our compliments and best wishes for your welfare and prosperity. Will you take Franklin's Key and make it the master-key to your own success in life? Sincerely,

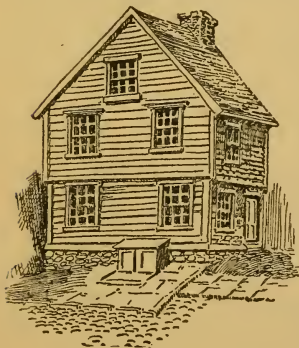
LAWRENCE SAVINGS AND TRUST COMPANY,
NEW CASTLE, PA.

FRANKLIN'S ANCESTRY AND BIRTH

THE Franklin family in England lived only thirty miles from Sulgrave Manor, Washington's ancestral home, not far from the busy town of Northampton. The great Franklin's father, Josiah, came to America in 1682, and settled in Boston, where his tenth and youngest son, Benjamin, was born, January 6, old style, or January 17, according to the present reckoning, in 1706. When an old man, Franklin wrote of his ancestors, from information furnished by an aged uncle, as follows:

"I learned that the family had lived in the same village, Ecton, in Northamptonshire, for three hundred years, and how much longer he knew not (perhaps from the time when the name of Franklin [a small landowner], that before was the name of an order of people, was assumed by them as a surname, when others took surnames all over the kingdom) on a freehold of about thirty acres, aided by the smith's

business, which had continued in the family till this time, the eldest son being always bred to that business, a custom which he and my father followed as to their eldest sons. When I searched the registers at Ecton, I found an account of their births, marriages and burials from the year 1555 only, there being no registers kept in that parish at any time preceding. By that register I perceived that I was the youngest son of the youngest son for five generations back."



A LEADER AMONG THE BOYS

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN tells us that he was sent to a grammar school when eight years old. Then his father took him out and put him in a school to learn writing and arithmetic. "I acquired fair writing pretty soon, but failed in arithmetic," writes Franklin. At ten he was taken home from even that school, to help his father make candles and boil soap. "I disliked the trade," says Franklin, "and had a strong inclination for the sea, but my father declared against it." He tells the following story of his experience as a leader among the boys of Boston town:

"There was a salt-marsh that bounded part of the mill-pond, on the edge of which, at high water, we used to stand to fish for minnows. By much trampling we had made it a mere quagmire. My proposal was to build a wharf there, fit for us to stand upon, and I showed my comrades a large heap of stones, which were intended for a new house near the marsh, and which would very well suit our purpose. Accordingly, in the evening, when the workmen were gone, I assembled a number of my playfellows, and working with them diligently like so many emmets [ants], sometimes two or three to a stone, we brought them all away and built our little wharf. The next morning the workmen were surprised at missing the stones, which were found in our wharf. Inquiry was made after the removers. We were discovered and complained of. Several of us were corrected by our fathers; and, though I pleaded the usefulness of the work, mine convinced me that nothing was useful which was not honest."



III

HOW HE "ESCAPED BEING A POET"

WUCH as Benjamin disliked the soap and candle business, he stayed and helped at it for two years. For fear the boy would run away to sea, Josiah Franklin took him to see other tradesmen, "joiners, bricklayers, turners, braziers, etc., at work," but none of them suited young Ben, who afterward wrote, referring to this time:

"From a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books. . . . This bookish inclination determined my father to make me a printer, though he already had one son in that profession. In 1717 my brother James returned from England with a press and letters [type] to set up his business in Boston. I liked it much better than that of my father, but still had a hankering for the sea."

The next year, when he was twelve, Benjamin was "bound," or apprenticed, to work for his brother at the printer's trade until he was twenty-one. As he was ingenious, industrious and apt to learn, he became very useful. He borrowed good books of the booksellers' clerks and read them through over night, often sitting up until early morning in order to finish a volume to be delivered to a customer next day.

Benjamin also tried his hand at writing ballads on current topics, which his brother encouraged him to put in type and sell about town. Of these Franklin wrote:

"They were wretched stuff. . . . The first sold wonderfully, the event being recent, having made a great noise. This flattered my vanity; but my father discouraged me by ridiculing my performances, and tell me verse-makers were generally beggars. So I escaped being a poet, most probably a very bad one."

IV

TWO REAL BOSTON BOYS

THE Franklin boy formed a friendship with another apprentice named Collins. Both liked to argue. Benjamin goes on to relate:

"A question was once, somehow or other, started between Collins and me, of the propriety of educating the female sex in learning, and their abilities for study. He was of the opinion that it was improper, and that they were naturally unequal to it. I took the contrary side, perhaps a little for dispute's sake."

About this time Benjamin met with an odd volume of the "Spectator," which he read with delight and practiced writing in his own words the ideas expressed therein and comparing his language with that of Addison. In this way he acquired the simple style which is still read with pleasure, while that of his contemporaries now seems stilted and pedantic.

When about sixteen years old he "happened to meet with a book, written by one Tryon, recommending a vegetable diet." One attraction this mode of living had for him was its cheapness, which enabled him to put the money he thus saved from his stomach into his head. He made an arrangement with his brother to let him board himself. Aside from saving most of his board money to buy books, he read during the time the others spent in going to and from their meals. He studied arithmetic to make up his earlier deficiency in that branch, read books on navigation, and even devoured Locke on "Human Understanding," and Xenophon's "Memorabilia of Socrates." He also learned to show modesty and tact in discussion.



A ONE-BOY-POWER NEWSPAPER

AFTER two or three years James Franklin started a newspaper, which he named "The New England Courant." Benjamin naïvely relates that friends tried to dissuade his brother from an enterprise so risky since there was already one other weekly newspaper in America! Could Benjamin Franklin return to his accustomed haunts in this twentieth century of grace he would, no doubt, be greatly interested in the telephone, telegraph and airships, but his widest astonishment would be over the modern daily newspaper.

"The New England Courant," was, in the opinion of its time, a sensational sheet. Its "yellow" tendencies got James Franklin into trouble. He was censured by the Assembly of the Province, and sent to prison for an offensive article, and his license to print was revoked by the House. So, to evade this decree, Benjamin Franklin's name appeared as publisher at the head of its columns. It thus became a one-boy-power newspaper. Benjamin secretly wrote articles, set up the type and printed them off on a foot-power press. When others praised his articles the youth let it be known that he was the writer of them. James Franklin, instead of being pleased with Ben's success, became more ill-natured and unreasonable, beating and illtreating his bright brother. Many years after this, Franklin wrote charitably of his quick-tempered brother and master:

"He was otherwise not an ill-natured man; perhaps I was too saucy and provoking."



BENJAMIN STEALS AWAY FROM HOME

JAMES FRANKLIN had a hot temper. He struck and abused his bound brother once too often. Taking advantage of his release from the apprenticeship (in order to make it legal for the youth to be announced as the publisher of the newspaper) Benjamin decided to flee from bondage to his brother. Fearing the lad would leave him, James Franklin went around among the few Boston printers and gave the boy such a bad name that Benjamin could not have found employment in his home town if he had tried. Their father took James's part, so Ben concluded to steal away to New York, the nearest city in which he could secure employment at his trade. His bookish friend, the disputing apprentice, aided him in the following manner, as Franklin himself explains:

"My friend Collins, therefore, undertook to manage a little for me. He agreed with the captain of a New York sloop for my passage. . . . So I sold some of my books to raise a little money, was taken on board privately, and as we had a fair wind, in three days I found myself in New York, near three hundred miles from home, a boy of but seventeen, without the least recommendation to, or knowledge of any person in the place, and with very little money in my pocket.

"My inclinations for the sea were by this time worn out, or I might now have gratified them. But, having a trade, and supposing myself a pretty good workman, I offered my service to the printer in the place, old Mr. William Bradford, who had been the first printer in Pennsylvania, but removed from thence upon a quarrel with George Keith. He could give me no employment . . . but, says he, 'My son at Philadelphia has lately lost his principal hand. . . . He may employ you.' "

ON TO PHILADELPHIA LOOKING FOR WORK

SO the runaway apprentice had to go on to Philadelphia to find work. He sailed to Amboy, on the Jersey coast, in a leaky boat with rotten sails, and nearly lost his life. Then he walked fifty miles across New Jersey in a drenching rain, from Amboy to Burlington, a town on the Delaware River. Besides being heartsick for fear he could get nothing to do at his trade, poor Ben was feverish and really ill. He told, afterwards, that, during that long tramp through rain and mud, he fervently wished he had not left home. He arrived at the river town on Saturday, just in time to miss the regular boat for Philadelphia. Rather than wait till Tuesday for the next passenger craft he hailed a passing boat which he helped to row nearly all the way down. He made his "entry" into Philadelphia, at the Market Street wharf, "about eight or nine o'clock" Sunday morning, October 10, 1723. He thus describes his first appearance there:

"I was in my working dress, my best clothes being to come round by sea. I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuffed out with shirts and stockings, and I knew no soul nor where to look for lodging. I was fatigued with travelling, rowing and want of rest, I was very hungry; and my whole stock of cash consisted of a Dutch dollar and about a shilling in copper. The latter I gave the people of the boat for my passage, who at first refused it, on account of my rowing, but I insisted on their taking it. A man being sometimes more generous when he has a little money than when he has plenty, perhaps through fear of being thought to have but little."

FRANKLIN MEETING HIS FUTURE WIFE

NATURALLY, after the labors of the preceding day and night, Benjamin was hungry. Asking for a three-penny loaf at a baker's he was given "three great puffy rolls." As his pockets were already full, he "walked off with a roll under each arm and eating the other." He continues:

"Thus I went up Market street as far as Fourth street, passing by the door of Mr. Read, my future wife's father; when she, standing at the door, saw me, and thought I made, as I certainly did, a most awkward, ridiculous appearance. Then I turned and went down Chestnut street and part of Walnut street, eating my roll all the way, and, coming round, found myself again at Market street wharf, near the boat I came in, to which I went for a draught of the river water; and, being filled with one of my rolls, gave the other two to a woman and her child that came down the river in the boat with us, and were waiting to go farther.

"Thus refreshed, I walked again up the street, which by this time had many clean-dressed people in it, who were all walking the same way. I joined them, and thereby was led into the great meeting-house of the Quakers near the market. I sat down among them, and, after looking round awhile and hearing nothing said, being very drowsy through labor and want of rest the preceding night, I fell fast asleep, and continued so till the meeting broke up, when one was kind enough to rouse me. This was, therefore, the first house I was in, or slept in, in Philadelphia."



IX

FINDING EMPLOYMENT

S TUMBLING out of the meeting-house the young printer was directed to an inn where he went right to bed and slept the rest of that day and all night. At Printer Bradford's, where he reported early Monday morning, he found they had just hired a hand, and there was no place for him. There was another printer, Keimer by name, in town. Franklin tells of applying to him:

"Keimer's printing house, I found, consisted of an old shattered press and one small, worn-out font of English, which he was then using himself. . . . There being no copy, but one pair of cases, . . . no one could help him. I endeavored to put his press (which he had not yet used and of which he understood nothing) into order fit to be worked with. I returned to Bradford's who gave me a little job to do for the present, and there I lodged and dieted. A few days after, Keimer sent for me. . . . He had got another pair of cases and a pamphlet to reprint, on which he set me to work.

"These two printers I found poorly qualified for their business. Bradford had not been bred to it and was very illiterate; and Keimer, though something of a scholar, was a mere compositor, knowing nothing of press work. . . .



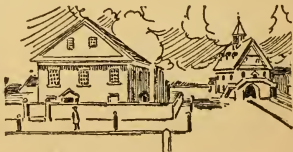
He did not like my lodging at Bradford's while I worked with him. He had a house, indeed, but without furniture, so he could not lodge me, but he got me a lodging at Mr. Read's, before mentioned, who was the owner of his house; and, my chest and clothes being come by this time, I made rather a more respectable appearance in the eyes of Miss Read than I had done when she first happened to see me eating my roll in the street."

TWO DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

I BEGAN now to have some acquaintances among the young people of the town," continues Franklin, "that were lovers of reading, with whom I spent my evenings very pleasantly; and gaining money by my industry and frugality, I lived very agreeably, forgetting Boston as much as I could, and not desiring that any there should know where I resided, except my friend Collins, who was in my secret, and kept it when I wrote to him."

Franklin had a brother-in-law, Captain Holmes, who was master of a sloop trading between Boston and Delaware. Holmes, hearing of the whereabouts of the runaway, wrote begging Benjamin to return to his anxious family and friends. The lad wrote explaining why he could not do so. This letter Holmes showed to his friend, Keith, Deputy Governor of Pennsylvania and Delaware. The Governor thought the writer of such a letter should be encouraged, and soon went to see the young printer, accompanied by a friend, Colonel French. Franklin tells of seeing two elegantly dressed gentlemen coming across the street evidently to call there:

"Keimer ran down immediately, thinking it a visit to him; but the governor inquired for me, came up, and with a condescension and politeness I had been quite unused to, made me many compliments, desired to be acquainted with me, blamed me kindly for not having made myself known to him when I first came to the place. . . . I was not a little surprised, and Keimer stared like a pig poisoned. . . . He proposed my setting up in business, laid before me the probabilities of success, and both he and Colonel French assured me I should have their interest and influence in procuring the public business of both governments. On my doubting whether my father would assist me in it, Sir William said he would give me a letter to him, in which he would state the advantages, and he did not doubt of prevailing with him. So it was concluded I should return to Boston in the first vessel, with the governor's letter recommending me to my father."



"The First House I Slept In"

RETURN OF THE RUNAWAY

BRANKLIN wrote:

"About the end of April, 1724, a little vessel offered for Boston. . . . The governor gave me an ample letter, saying many flattering things of me to my father, and strongly recommending the project of my setting up at Philadelphia as a thing that must make my fortune. . . . I had been absent seven months, and my friends had heard nothing of me; for my brother-in-law, Holmes, was not yet returned, and had not written about me. My unexpected appearance surprised the family; all were, however, very glad to see me, and made me welcome, except my brother. I went to see him at his printing-house. I was better dressed than ever while in his service, having a genteel new suit from head to foot, a watch, and my pockets lined with near five pounds sterling [\$25] in silver. He received me not yet frankly, looked me all over, and turned to his work again.

"The journeymen were inquisitive where I had been, what sort of country it was, and how I liked it. I praised it much, and the happy life I led in it, expressing strongly my intention of returning to it; and, one of them asking what kind of money we had there, I produced a handful of silver, and spread it before them, which was a kind of raree-show they had not been used to, paper being the money of Boston. Then I took the opportunity of letting them see my watch, . . . (my brother still grum and sullen). . . . This visit of mine offended him extremely. . . .

"My father received the governor's letter with some apparent surprise, . . . but he was clear in the impropriety of it, and at last gave a flat denial to it."

The father gave consent to Benjamin's return to Philadelphia, writing to Governor Keith that Benjamin was "too young to be trusted with a business so important, and for which the preparation must be so expensive."



STRANDED IN A FOREIGN LAND

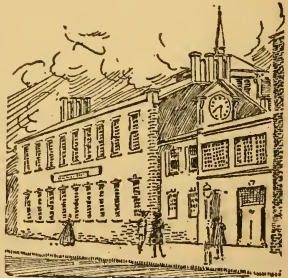
SINCE your father will not set you up," said Keith, "I will do it myself. Give me an inventory of the things necessary to be had from England, and I will send for them."

Then he decided that Benjamin would better go himself and profit by the experience. Franklin, not doubting the governor's sincerity, sailed for England in November, 1724, expecting to find promised letters and necessary funds on his arrival in London. Instead, he learned there that Keith was without credit, having debts instead of money, and that he was looked upon in London as a rascal.

Among those on shipboard were Andrew Hamilton, who built the first State House for Pennsylvania (now Independence Hall) and a kind old Quaker merchant, named Deuham, who, when he learned of the young printer's plight advised him to find work at his trade, saying, "Among the printers here you will improve yourself, and when you return to America you will set up to greater advantage."

When Franklin returned to Philadelphia, the ex-governor and the young printer bowed coolly, but did not stop to talk. Franklin still "gave the devil his due" as follows:

"But what should we think of a governor's playing such pitiful tricks and imposing so grossly on a poor, ignorant boy! It was a habit he had acquired. He wished to please everybody; and, having little to give, he gave expectations. He was otherwise an ingenious, sensible man, a pretty good writer and a good governor for the people Several of our best laws were of his planning and passed during his administration."



ONE OF HIS FIRST GREAT MISTAKES

A FRIEND named Ralph went to England with young Franklin. Ralph failed to find employment as a writer or an actor, so he was dependent upon the sturdy, thrifty young printer, who paid his own and Ralph's expenses and took his unemployed friend to the theater besides. After months the self-styled writer and actor secured a position as teacher in a small country school, and went away considerably in debt to Franklin. Soon afterwards Ralph took offense at some fancied injury on the part of his kind friend. Of this piece of pettiness Franklin wrote:

"So I found I was never to expect his repaying me what I lent to him, or advanced for him. This, however, was not then of much consequence, as he was totally unable; and in the loss of his friendship I found myself relieved from a burden. I now began to think of getting a little money beforehand."

Franklin seems to have been unfortunate in his friends. Young Collins had gone back to Philadelphia with him on his return from Boston. Franklin had been entrusted with a little over \$100 by his brother John to be paid to a man named Vernon. Collins took to drink and gambling, and Franklin became so involved that he felt obliged to spend some of Vernon's money. This caused the honest young printer considerable anxiety, and when he was an old man, looking back upon a long and honorable career, Dr. Franklin wrote:

"The breaking into this money of Vernon's was one of the first great errata of my life."

As for his arguing apprentice friend, Collins, he became a drunken nuisance, and finally went off to Barbados as a tutor, promising to pay up out of the first money he earned, but Franklin wrote, "I never heard of him after."

FINDING FRIENDS IN LONDON

FRANKLIN first found work at Palmer's, a famous printing house, where he stayed a year. While there he wrote his "Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain," which he dedicated to his friend Ralph. It was an original and rather radical essay for a boy of nineteen, but it gained for him consideration and friends. In fact, everything he did seemed to attract others to him. By his swimming feats he won the friendship of a young man of "quality," named Wygate, whom he quickly taught to swim. This young man invited others to go with him and his wonderful friend on a river excursion, of which Franklin relates:

"In our return, at the request of the company . . . I stripped and swam from near Chelsea to Blackfriars [about three miles around by the Thames] performing on the way many feats of activity, both upon and under the water, that surprised and pleased those to whom they were novelties." And later:

"I was, to my surprise, sent for by a great man I knew only by name, a Sir William Wyndham, and I waited upon him. . . . He had two sons about to set out on their travels; he wished to have them taught swimming, and proposed to gratify me handsomely if I would teach them. . . . I thought it quite likely that if I were to remain in England and open a swimming school I might get a good deal of money."

Late in life Franklin told of other swimming exploits. One he describes as follows:

"Being desirous of amusing myself with my kite and enjoying at the same time the pleasure of swimming . . . I found that, lying on my back and holding the stick in my hands, I was drawn along the surface of the water in a very agreeable manner. . . . I began to cross the pond with my kite, which carried me quite over without the least fatigue and with the greatest pleasure imaginable."



"THE WATER AMERICAN"

AFTER a working year at Palmer's, Franklin found employment at Watts's, a still larger printing establishment, which paid him a little better. It was at Watts's that he first asserted himself for temperance. He says of this incident:

"I drank only water: the other workmen, near fifty in number, were great guzzlers of beer. On occasion, I carried up and down stairs a large form of types in both hands. They wondered to see, from this and several instances, that the water American, as they called me, was stronger than themselves who drank strong beer!"

Franklin argued that there was more nourishment in a pennyworth of bread than in all their beer. But they kept wasting their wages, "and thus," he continued, "these poor wretches keep themselves always under."

When he had been about eighteen months in London, Wygate proposed that Franklin travel over Europe with him, giving water exhibitions and swimming lessons. He told Mr. Denham of Wygate's proposal, but the good old Quaker advised the young printer to go back to Pennsylvania with him, as clerk and bookkeeper in his store. Young Franklin was rather pleased with the idea, and they returned in October, 1726. Merchant and clerk roomed together, and everything was going smoothly when Mr. Denham died, leaving Franklin a small legacy, but out of employment, at the age of twenty-one.

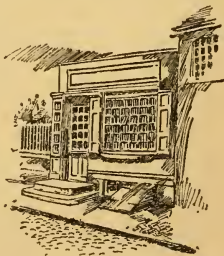


Watts's Press

THE FIRST FRANKLIN PRINTING COMPANY

FRANKLIN afterwards admitted that he committed two great *errata*. One was the publishing of his paper on "Liberty and Necessity," and the other was his failure to write to Miss Read, to whom he had been very attentive in Philadelphia; she, not hearing from him, married a man who afterwards left her, and it was reported that he already had a wife who was living in England. Franklin tried to correct and atone for this *erratum* by a marriage with that young woman. She was the daughter of the man with whom he boarded, the same young girl who had laughed at him on his first appearance in Philadelphia.

After an unsuccessful attempt to find a position as a merchant's clerk, Franklin reluctantly applied to his old employer, Keimer, who employed him at a high salary to teach several apprentices. As soon as the new hands began to show a little skill Keimer became disagreeable, and finally insulted Franklin, thus getting rid of him, for the expert printer left without further ado. In this way Keimer thoughtlessly raised up a formidable rival for himself, as Hugh Meredith, one of the well-instructed apprentices, came at once and proposed a partnership with Franklin. Meredith's father furnished the money and Franklin hired a house near the market. Thus began, in 1727, the famous printing establishment which continues to this day, a lineal descendant of Franklin's printing shop, and is now so widely known as the Franklin Printing Company.



Franklin's First Shop

INCREASING INFLUENCE

ABOUT this time Franklin organized some kindred spirits into a club which he named the Junto. Its members met every Friday evening for reading and discussion. They wrote papers on all sorts of themes, such as, "How may smoky chimneys be best cured?" and, "Is the emission of paper money safe?" About forty years later, in 1768, when the Junto became the American Philosophical Society, Franklin was elected its first president.

Another of Keimer's apprentices, George Webb, who "had found a female friend that lent him wherewith to purchase his time of Keimer, now came to offer himself a journeyman to us." Franklin happened to mention to young Webb the fact that he intended to start a weekly newspaper as a competitor of the *Mercury*, already published by Bradford, the oldest printer in Philadelphia. Webb indiscreetly told of Franklin's intention, so Keimer, hearing of it, hastened to start first another paper which he named *The Universal Instructor in All Arts and Science and the Pennsylvania Gazette*. Franklin, undaunted, contributed to Bradford's paper, the *Mercury*, a series of gossipy articles which he called the "Busybody," in which he ridiculed Keimer's dull sheet and its long name. This poor paper, a blatant demonstration of stupidity, worried along for nine months with only ninety subscribers, when Franklin bought it "for a trifle," and dropped all its encyclopaedic name but *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, which is still published weekly as *The Saturday Evening Post*.



Franklin's First
Portrait

XVIII

AMERICA'S FIRST GREAT HUMORIST AND ADVERTISING MAN

IN many respects Benjamin Franklin seemed to be centuries in advance of his time. He filled his newspaper with wit and wisdom not found in the book from which his plodding competitors copied when there were no events or incidents to chronicle. "No news" was "good news" to the readers of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* while Franklin was its editor and publisher. He wrote bright, snappy letters to his own paper, signing them, according to their tenor, "Alice Addertongue," "Bob Brief," "Anthony Afterwit," and so on. When nothing better was at hand, he would turn himself into "copy," once entertaining his readers with a witty account, filled with puns, of his falling into a barrel of tar. His paper abounded in humor, science, gossip, literature—everything that is found in the modern newspaper; it became the most popular and influential journal south of New York. In addition to being the first great American humorist, Franklin was far and away in advance of his time in the matter of advertising. He wrote many "ads" for his patrons and on his own account. The advertisement he published about his mother-in-law's itch ointment was worthy of a better subject. The greatest hit he made, in an advertising way, was the grave announcement, in his first "Poor Richard's Almanack," of the exact day, hour and minute, when the death of Titan Leeds, the publisher of an old and successful almanac, should take place. Leeds, as intended, came out with a violent denial—declaring that he did *not* die as stated, and that "Poor Richard" was "a Fool, a Lyar and a conceited Scribler." This was just what Franklin wanted, for it advertised "Poor Richard," of which the circulation soon surpassed that of his enraged competitor.

“POOR RICHARD” AND HIS “ALMANACK.”

THE old almanacs used to take the place of the magazines which were not then published as now. Each printer in Philadelphia published one of those annual pamphlets in large numbers. The one printed by Franklin was composed by Thomas Godfrey, who lived over the printing shop, and Franklin boarded with the family. But Thomas became offended with Franklin and moved away, taking his almanac to another printer for publication. But Franklin was too resourceful to be disheartened. An almanac was a lucrative kind of printing. It could be done throughout the year. The young printer decided to make the calculations and write an almanac himself. Realizing that the computations and predictions of a young man would carry but little weight with the people, he pretended to print the annual of a poor old “philomath and star-gazer” named Richard Saunders, whom he called “Poor Richard.” He boldly introduced himself in this new character in his first almanac (that of 1733) as follows:

“COURTEOUS READER: I might in this place attempt to gain thy favor by declaring that I write Almanacks with no other end in view than that of the public good, but in this I should not be sincere; and men are now-a-days too wise to be deceived by pretences, how specious so ever. The plain truth of the matter is I am excessive poor, and my wife, good woman, is, I tell her, excessive proud; she cannot bear, she says, to sit spinning in her shift of tow, while I do nothing but gaze at the stars; and has threatened more than once to burn all my books and rattling traps (as she calls my instruments), if I do not make some profitable use of them for the good of my family.”

Thus “Poor Richard” became the first created character in American fiction, and his “Almanack” was the most popular of them all because of its half humorous, thrifty maxims. Franklin wrote and published this almanac for twenty-five years.

A TRUE PHILANTHROPIST

FRANKLIN asks, "What signifies philosophy that does not apply to some use?" He was eminently practical. Though a "savant among savages," he gave no time to useless speculation. Some of his simple, homely questions in the Junto resulted in the practical benefit and comfort of mankind. He asked there why a candle flame tapers up to a point, and brought forth a draft lamp before Argand invented his burner applying the same principle. He answered his own query, "How may smoky chimneys best be cured?" with the Franklin stove, which has imparted warmth and comfort to many millions. He invented and improved many little conveniences now in common use. With all his thrift in money matters Franklin would never patent any of his inventions. He wrote to a friend: "I have no private interest in the reception of my inventions by the world, having never made nor proposed to make the least profit by any of them."

Though he was the Edison of his time, Franklin was a public benefactor because of his public spirit, founding "a college, a library, a newspaper, a magazine, a learned society, a hospital, a fire company," besides organizing the first Masonic lodge in America, and inaugurating systems of street cleaning, lighting and police department. Hume, the great English historian, declared Franklin to be "the first writer in America."



Franklin's First Stove

“IN PUBLIC BUSINESS”

THE first mistake in public business is going into it, said “Poor Richard,” twenty years after Franklin had entered the general service as assistant postmaster of Philadelphia. He had been as saving of his time as of his money. At thirty—in 1736—Franklin was elected clerk or secretary to the Pennsylvania General Assembly (then made up of forty members). “No gains without pains,” said “Poor Richard.” When Franklin’s “pains” began to be rewarded, the smaller honors came in upon him thick and fast. He was elected a trustee of the Academy he had started (now the University of Pennsylvania); the governor of the province appointed him a justice of the peace—then quite an honor. In Philadelphia he was elected to the board of aldermen. He was soon made a member of the General Assembly of the province of Pennsylvania, to which he was reelected ten times.

In 1737 Franklin received his appointment as assistant and acting postmaster of Philadelphia, where he found defects and inaugurated several reforms in the postal service. After sixteen years of this service the postmaster-general died, and Franklin succeeded him. This office for all the colonies made it necessary for Franklin to travel up and down the whole country, when he found that his fame had preceded him and made him a man of renown throughout the colonies and in England.

When he returned to Boston, thirty years after he ran away from there, he had become a man of renown. His brother James was still unsuccessful and unhappy. Benjamin returned good for evil by taking James’s ten-year-old son back to Philadelphia, sending him to school, teaching him the printer’s trade, and setting him up in business.

“THE KING’S BUSINESS REQUIRES HASTE”

WHEN Franklin became postmaster-general there were seventy-five postoffices in the whole country. (Now there are over sixty thousand.) The greatest innovation he proposed was the running of a “stage wagon” between New York and Philadelphia as often as once a week whether there was any mail to carry or not! Before this the mails had been carried by old or incapacitated men who consulted their own health and convenience, sometimes waiting several weeks until they thought enough mail had accumulated to make a trip worth while. When Franklin installed his “fast mail” service the wiseacres shook their heads and said he was going too fast to hold out long.

In the war with the French and Indians Franklin was designated to induce the people (many of whom were Quakers who were opposed to the idea of war) to aid and support an army. He once pledged his own fortune to those who furnished the British army with horses, wagons and other necessities. In this capacity Franklin met General Braddock, whom he tried to advise as to the best way to fight the French and their Indian allies. He said of Braddock: “He smiled at my ignorance and replied, ‘These savages may, indeed, be a formidable enemy to your raw American militia, but upon the King’s regular and disciplined troops, sir, it is impossible that they should make any impression.’ ”



Franklin and Braddock



“UNITED, WE STAND; DIVIDED, WE FALL”

AFTER the Stamp Act and the domineering attitude of the British became manifest, the angry colonists called a conference at Albany in 1754. Franklin printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, a woodcut of a snake cut into sections representing the American colonies and under the pieces the legend, “*Unite or Die.*”

William Penn’s descendants were called the “proprietaries” or owners of the province. They refused to bear their due share of the expense of carrying on the war against the French in defense of their vast ancestral estate. So Franklin was elected to represent the people of Pennsylvania and try to show the king, as well as Thomas and Richard Penn, that the people of that province had real grievances. The Penn family dallied and delayed him, not keeping their appointments, so that Franklin was detained in London five years, from 1757 to 1762. During this long time, however, Franklin succeeded in obtaining the king’s consent to the taxing of the proprietaries. On his return the colonial agent threw himself with greater zeal than ever into the labor of uniting the colonies for the “irrepressible conflict” which he saw coming. It was he, more than any other man, who made the union of the colonies finally possible, expressing his life sentiments, with a quiet smile to the other signers of the Declaration of Independence:

“We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.”



“A GOOD AND FAITHFUL HELPMATE”

FRANKLIN returned to Philadelphia in 1762. The proprietaries, embittered against Franklin, succeeded, in 1764, in defeating his election to the Assembly. But their victory turned out to be a boomerang, for the Assembly appointed him to draft a petition against them and sent him again to present that document to the king. So, in December, 1764, Franklin was back, after two years' absence from England, in his former lodgings in London. The relations between the mother country and the American colonies had become grievously strained, and Franklin's lot in England was far from easy or pleasant. Even the ministry was petty enough to slight and insult him personally. But Franklin kept his temper and met the spite and in-criminations of the colonial governors and the ignorant misapprehensions of the people with true American humor.

While Franklin was in England this time his wife died. Deborah Read Franklin was said to have a temper of her own. She certainly had much to try her patience with her gifted husband, but she exercised the same charity toward him that he had manifested toward her. After her death Franklin wrote: "Frugality is an enriching virtue—a virtue I never could acquire myself; but I was lucky enough to find it in a wife, who thereby became a fixture to me." "Poor Richard" once wrote: "A good wife lost is God's gift lost."



Deborah Read Franklin

TOO LATE TO AVERT A WAR

IN the midst of the strife Franklin was summoned to appear before the House of Commons and answer hard questions concerning the state of affairs in America. His replies were so shrewd and masterly that George the Third said to his ministers and court: "That crafty American is more than a match for you all."

Franklin returned to America, in the spring of 1775, when the first battle of the Revolution was fought at Lexington and Concord. After reaching Philadelphia Franklin wrote back the following humorous description of the retreat of the British regulars from Concord to Boston:

"General Gage's troops made a most vigorous retreat—twenty miles in three hours—scarce to be paralleled in history; the feeble Americans, who pelted them all the way, could scarce keep up with them."

The government was then willing to repeal obnoxious measures. But it was too late. Franklin's faith was strong all through "the times that try men's souls." He proved this by giving back \$15,000, voted to him by Pennsylvania, to promote the cause of liberty. It was then that Franklin wrote to his friend Strahan in London:



"Philada., July 5, 1775.

"MR. STRAHAN.

"You are a member of Parliament, and of one of that majority which has doomed my country to destruction. You have begun to burn our towns and murder our people. Look upon your hands. They are stained with the blood of your relations! You and I were long friends; you are now my enemy, and,

"I am,

"Yours,

"B. FRANKLIN."

AMERICA'S "FRIEND AT COURT."

THE French were Franklin's most enthusiastic admirers and, since they were the ancient and natural enemies of the English, no one could wield a mightier influence in France than Benjamin Franklin. So when they earnestly suggested that he go right back to France, he waived his private preferences. He knew that England would be glad to catch him on the high seas, and hang him as an arch-traitor. But, though Franklin was old, he was "game" to the end. He made his characteristic reply:

"I am old and good for nothing; as the store-keepers say of their remnants of cloth, I am but a 'fag-end'; you may have me 'for what you please!'"

Franklin was indeed the "friend at court" in France for the colonies. He had to be all things to all men. It was his part of the great game of American independence. Many foolish stories are still repeated about Franklin's flirtations in France. It should be remembered that at the time of his so-called *galantries* he was a widower of seventy-five and Madam Helvetius a widow of sixty or more.

Meanwhile he was carrying the crushing load of his country's credit. He persuaded and cajoled the French king and the court into furnishing the Americans with money and men, and at last a whole navy! The French were the first to recognize American independence. Other monarchs soon followed. Nearly all this time the slow sailing ships brought only tidings of disasters to the cause of liberty. Franklin's optimistic, "Oh, that's all right" became a by-word and a song in France. After Howe entered Philadelphia, a gloating Englishman called to tell the American minister in Paris about it; the grand old philosopher met him with a sturdy reply that later events proved to be true: "I beg your pardon, sir, *Philadelphia has taken Howe!*"

HIS GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

IF Franklin had been an angel from heaven or a visitor from Mars, he could hardly have been received with more enthusiastic admiration.

His portrait or a Franklin stove was found in nearly every house in Paris. His expressions were repeated by everyone, and when he went out he was followed by a crowd of admirers. Everything that could be so named—like hats, coats, canes and snuff-boxes, were made *à la Franklin*. Painters and engravers seemed never to tire of representing Franklin as a demigod, a hero, or the Father of Liberty. It was Turgot, a French *savant*, who originated the Latin epigram, which has been variously translated: "He snatched the lightning from the heavens and the scepter from tyrants."

This was in allusion to Franklin's great experiment with kite and key with which he attracted the lightning and proved that lightning and electricity are the same. This was by no means his most important discovery, but, as it seemed like flying in the face of Providence, it appealed to the popular mind.

The greatest achievement of Benjamin Franklin was the originating of "Poor Richard's" thrifty sayings. These entered into the life of the people and have borne fruit inestimable in American prosperity and progress. The maxims have become household words in one hundred and fifty languages and dialects, to be used daily on the lips of myriad millions down the centuries. This everyday common sense was the key to Franklin's success, and that of every man and nation that applies the sound and enduring principles that Franklin began, as a youth, to make the rule of his life.



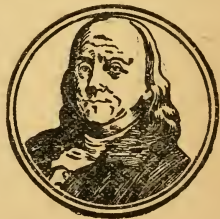
“A MAN DILIGENT IN BUSINESS”

TAKING into consideration his many-sidedness, Franklin was without doubt the greatest man America has ever produced.

On the 14th of September, 1784, Franklin arrived again at the same wharf in Philadelphia at which he had landed about sixty years before—a dirty, hungry, runaway lad. But how different the scene! Many church bells rang the glad tidings, and the great Liberty Bell added its deep tribute to the Father of Independence. From house to house was heard the happy news: “Franklin is come home. Dr. Franklin is here!” Crowds of fellow-citizens and friends, among whom were the chief dignitaries of city and State, and of some of the great institutions he had founded, met and escorted him to his modest home.

Here he lived four years with his beloved daughter, Sarah, and her children, who helped in entertaining the stream of visitors who came from all parts of the world to see him. He died on the 17th of April, 1790, at the age of eighty-four, and twenty thousand people attended his funeral. He prided himself upon the fact that he had been called to stand before five of the world’s mightiest monarchs as the champion of the liberties of a great republic. He used to quote, as the key to success in life, the words of Solomon the Wise, whose Proverbs are now less familiar than his own:

“Seest thou a man diligent in business? He shall stand before kings.”



SOME HOUSEHOLD WORDS BY FRANKLIN
AS "POOR RICHARD"

A penny saved is a penny earned.

Haste makes waste.

Wealth is not his that has it, but his that enjoys it.

Lying rides upon debt's back.

He that goes a-borrowing, goes a-sorrowing.

God helps them that help themselves.

Drive thy business—let not that drive thee.

Lost time is never found again.

Empty thy purse into thy head.

Drink water; put the money into your pocket.

He that hath a trade hath an estate.

Have you somewhat to do to-morrow? Do it to-day.

Early to bed and early to rise,

Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.

Diligence is the mother of good luck.

Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee.

If you would be wealthy think of saving as well as getting.

At a great pennyworth pause a while.

If you would know the value of money, go and try to borrow some.

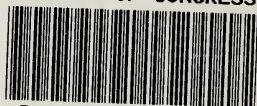
When 'tis fair, be sure and take your great-coat with you.

Be industrious and free.

A word to the wise is enough.

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